



GEAR UP SOUTHERN
WEST VIRGINIA
CONCORD • NEW RIVER CTC

News Release

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GEAR UP SWV Using Data to Steer Program with Appointment of New Assistant Director

Athens, W.Va., January 8, 2024 – GEAR UP SWV (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) in southern West Virginia is proud to announce the appointment of Dr. Sheila Barnhart Womack as the new Assistant Director. Womack, who joined the team in mid-September, brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to her role, reinforcing GEAR UP SWV's commitment to utilizing data for informed decision-making that addresses the unique needs of families in southern West Virginia.

Prior to joining the GEAR UP SWV team, Womack was Director of Student Success at Concord University's Center for Academic and Career Development. She spent 5 years focused on providing holistic support for college students, especially first-year students, to help them achieve their postsecondary goals.

As Assistant Director, Dr. Womack will play a pivotal role in steering GEAR UP SWV's initiatives by collecting and analyzing data that informs programmatic decisions. Her work will be instrumental in tailoring GEAR UP SWV's efforts to meet the specific needs of students and families in Mercer, Monroe, Summers, Wyoming, and Raleigh Counties. This position focuses on making sure that GEAR UP SWV utilizes a data driven process to implement best practice services for reaching GEAR UP SWV's goals.

"GEAR UP SWV is such a wonderful and unique opportunity to empower and prepare the young people and families of our region to pursue higher education," said Dr. Womack. "I believe strongly in the power of education to transform lives and communities and am so excited to be a part of this project that has the potential to revitalize and strengthen part of this beautiful state that I love and have come to consider home!"

The data will help steer the project as we work to achieve four main goals of GEAR UP SWV.

- Goal 1:** To increase academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education for students.
- Goal 2:** Increase the rate of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education for schools for students in these five counties.
- Goal 3:** Increase students' and families' knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.
- Goal 4:** Increase academic, postsecondary, and social and emotional resilience.

"The focus of GEAR UP SWV's data-driven approach is to enhance the support provided to students in the class of 2028 and 2029, who are currently 7th and 8th graders in our public schools in five local counties. By leveraging data, GEAR UP SWV aims to create targeted programs and resources that empower students and contribute to their academic success," Dr. Womack added.

Parents and guardians of students, as well as GEAR UP SWV supporters, are encouraged to stay engaged with the program's initiatives as the program grows and evolves under Dr. Womack's tenure as Assistant Director.

GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs and is part of a national grant program funded through the U.S. Department of Education. GEAR UP Southern West Virginia (GEAR UP SWV) is a Concord University program, in partnership with New River Community and Technical College, that helps students graduate from high school and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP SWV is helping the classes of 2028 and 2029 in Mercer, Monroe, Summers, Raleigh, and Wyoming Counties to ensure high school graduation. The program also informs students and families of ways to succeed in a postsecondary education and ways to help fund it. GEAR UP SWV supports teachers, administrators, students, and families on this educational journey.

GEAR UP SWV; securing a legacy of strength and resilience in Appalachia. Find more information on GEAR UP SWV social media pages and on our website, conord.edu/gearup.

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